FRAN

BY

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SYNOPSIS.

Fran arrives at Hamilton Gregory's home in Littleburg but finds him absent conducting the choir at a camp meeting. She repairs thither in search of him, laughs during the service and is asked to leave. Abbott Ashton, superintendent of schools, escorts Fran from the tent. He tells her Gregory is a wealthy man, deeply interested in charity work, and a pillar of the church. Ashton becomes greatly interested in Fran and while taking leave of her, holds her hand and is seen by Sapphira Clinton, sister of Robert Clinton, chairman of the school board. Fran tells Gregory she wants a home with him. Grace Noir, Gregory's private secretary, takes a violent dislike to Fran and advises her to go away at once. Fran hints at a twenty-year-old secret, and Gregory in agitation asks Grace to leave the room. Fran relates the story of how Gregory married a young girl at Springfield while attending college and then deserted her. Fran is the child of that marriage. Gregory had married his present wife three years before the death of Fran's mother. Fran takes a liking to Mrs. Gregory. Gregory explains that Fran is the daughter of a very dear friend who is dead. Fran agrees to the story. Mrs. Gregory insists on her making her home with them and takes her to her arms. It is decided that Fran must go to school. Grace shows persistent interest in Gregory's story of his dead friend and hints that Fran may be an impostor. Fran declares that the secretary must go. Grace begins nagging tactics in an effort to drive Fran from the Gregory home but Mrs. Gregory remains staunch in her friendship. Fran is ordered before Superintendent Ashton to be punished for insubordination in school. Chairman Clinton is present. The affair ends in Fran leaving the school in company of the two men to the amazement of the scandalmongers of the town.

CHAPTER X.—Continued.

"Lem me!" Jakey pleaded, with fine admiration.

"Well, I rather guess not!" cried Bob. "Think I'll refuse Fran's first request?" He sped upstairs, uncommonly light of foot.

"Now," whispered Fran wickedly, "let's run off and leave him."

"I'm with you!" Abbott whispered joyfully.

They burst from the building like a storm, Fran laughing musically, Abbott laughing joyously, Jakey laughing loudest of all. They sallied down the front walk under the artillery fire of hostile eyes from the green veranda. They continued merry. Jakey even swaggered, fancying himself a part of it; he regretted his short trousers.

When Robert Clinton overtook them, he was red and breathless, but Fran's beribboned hat was clutched triumphantly in his hand. It was he who first discovered the ambuscade. He suddenly remembered, looked across the street, then fell desperately wounded. The shots would have passed unheeded over Abbott's head, had not Fran called his attention to the ambuscade.

"It's a good thing," she said innocently, "that you're not holding my hand—" and she nodded toward the boarding house. Abbott looked, and turned for one despairing glance at Bob; the latter was without sign of life.

"What shall we do?" inquired Fran, as they halted irresolutely. "If we run for it, it'll make things worse."

"Oh, Lord yes!" groaned Bob; "don't make a bolt!"

Abbott pretended not to understand. "Come on, Fran, I shall go home with you." His fighting blood was up. In his face was no surrender, no, not even to Grace Noir. "Come," he persisted, with dignity.

"How jolly!" Fran exclaimed. "Shall we go through the grove?—that's the longest way."

"Then let us go that way," responded Abbott stubbornly.

"Abbott," the school director warned, "you'd better come on over to my place—I'm going there this instant to—to get a cup of tea. It'll be best for you, old fellow, you listen to me, now—you need a little—a—some—a little stimulant."

"No," Abbott returned definitely. He had done nothing wrong and he resented the accusing glances from across the way. "No, I'm going with Fran."

"And don't you bother about him," Fran called after the retreating chairman of the board, "he'll have stimulant enough."

CHAPTER XI.

The New Bridge at Midnight.

It was almost time for summer vacation. Like all conscientious superintendents of public schools, Abbott Ashton found the closing week especially fatiguing. Examinations were nerve-testing, and correction of examination papers called for late hours over the lamp. Ashton had fallen into the reprehensible habit of bolting from the boarding house, after the last paper had been graded, no matter how late the night, and making his way rapidly from town as if to bathe his soul in country solitude. Like all reprehensible habits this one was presently to revenge itself by getting the "professor" into trouble.

One beautiful moonlight night, he was nearing the suburbs, when he made a discovery. The discovery was twofold: First, that the real cause of his nightly wanderings was not altogether a weariness of mental toil; second, that he had, for some time, been trying to escape from the thought of Fran. He had not known this. He had simply run, asking no questions. It was when he suddenly discovered Fran in the flesh, as she slipped along a crooked alley, gliding in shadows, that the cause of much sleeplessness was made tangible.

Abbott was greatly disturbed. Why should Fran be stealthily darting down side alleys at midnight? The wonder suggested its corollary—why was he running as from some intangible enemy? But now was no time for introspection, and he set himself the task of solving the new mystery. As Fran merged from the mouth of the alley, Abbott dived into its bowels, but when he reached the next street, no Fran was to be seen.

Had she darted into one of the scattered cabins that composed the fringe of Littleburg? At the mere thought, he felt a nameless shrinking of the heart. Surely not. But could she possibly, however fleet of foot, have rounded the next corner before his coming into the light? Abbott sped along the street that he might know the truth, though he realized that the less he saw of Fran the better. However, the thought of her being alone in the outskirts of the village, most assuredly without her guardian's knowledge, seemed to call him to duty. Call or no call, he went.

It seemed to him a long time before he reached the corner. He darted around it—yonder sped Fran like a thin shadow racing before the moon. She ran. Abbott ran. It was like a foot-race without spectators.

At last she reached the bridge spanning a ravine in whose far depths murmured a little stream. The bridge was new, built to replace the foot-bridge upon which Abbott and Fran had stood on the night of the tent-meeting. Was it possible that the superintendent of instruction was about to venture a second time across this ravine with the same girl, under the same danger of misunderstanding, revealed by similar glory of moonlight? Conscience whispered that it would not be enough simply to warn; he should escort her to Hamilton Gregory's very door, that he might know she had been rescued from the wide white night; and his conscience was possibly upheld by the knowledge that a sudden advent of a Miss Sapphira was morally impossible.

Fran's back had been toward him all the time. She was still unaware of his presence, as she paused in the middle of the bridge, and with critical eye sought a position mathematically the same from either hand-rail. Standing there, she drew a package from her bosom, hastily seated herself upon the boards, and, oblivious of surroundings, bent over the package as it rested in her lap.

Abbott, without pause, hurried up. His feet sounded on the bridge.

Fran was speaking aloud, and, on that account, did not hear him, as he came up behind her. "Grace Noir," she was saying—"Abbott Ashton—Bob Clinton — Hamilton Gregory — Mrs. Gregory—Simon Jefferson—Mrs. Jefferson—Miss Sapphira — Fran — the Devil—" She seemed to be calling the roll of her acquaintances. Was she reading a list from the package?

Abbott trod noisily on the fresh pine floor.

Fran swiftly turned, and the moonbeams revealed a flush, yet she did not attempt to rise. "Why didn't you answer when you heard your name called?" she asked with a good deal of composure.

"But Whose Hearts Are We King and Queen Of?"

"Fran!" Abbott exclaimed. "Here all alone at midnight—all alone! Is it possible?"

"No, it isn't possible," Fran returned satirically, "for I have company."

Abbott warmly urged her to hasten back home; at the same time he drew nearer and discovered that her lap was covered with playing-cards.

"But you mustn't stay here," he said imperatively. "Let us go at once."

"Just as soon as I tell the fortunes. Of course I wouldn't go to all this trouble for nothing. Now look. This card is Fran—the queen of hearts. This one is Simon Jefferson—and this one is Bob. And you—but it's no use telling all of them. Now; we want to see who's going to marry."

Abbott spoke in his most authoritative tone: "Fran! Get up and come with me before somebody sees you here. This is not only ridiculous, it's wrong and dreadfully imprudent."

Fran looked up with flashing eyes. "I won't!" she cried. "Not till I've told the fortunes. I'm not the girl to go away until she's done what she came to do." Then she added mildly, "Abbott, I just had to say it in that voice, so you'd know I meant it. Don't be cross with me."

She shuffled the cards.

"But why must you stay out here to do it?" he groaned.

"Because this is a new bridge. I'd hate to be a professor, and not know that it has to be in the middle of a new bridge, at midnight, over running water, in the moonlight. Now you keep still and be nice; I want to see who's going to get married. Here is Grace Noir, and here is Fran . . ."

"And where am I?" asked Abbott, in an awed voice, as he bent down.

Fran wouldn't tell him.

He bent over. "Oh, I see, I see!" he cried. "This is me—" he drew a card from the pack—"the king of hearts." He held it triumphantly. "Well. And you are the queen of hearts, you said."

"Maybe I am," said Fran, rather breathlessly, "but whose hearts are we king and queen of? That's what I want to find out." And she showed her teeth at him.

"We can draw and see," he suggested, sinking upon one knee. "And yet, since you're the queen and I'm the king, it must be each other's hearts—"

He stopped abruptly at sight of her crimsoned cheeks.

"That doesn't always follow," Fran told him hastily; "not by any means. For here are other queens. See the queen of spades? Maybe you'll get her. Maybe you want her. You see, she either goes to you, or to the next card."

"But I don't want any queen of spades," Abbott declared. He drew the next card, and exclaimed dramatically, "Saved, saved! Here's Bob. Give her to Bob Clinton."

"Oh, Abbott!" Fran exclaimed, looking at him with starlike eyes and roselike cheeks, making the most fascinating picture he had ever beheld at midnight under a silver moon. "Do you mean that? Remember you're on a new bridge over running water."

Abbott paused uneasily. She looked less like a child than he had ever seen her. Her body was very slight—but her face was . . . It is marvelous how much of a woman's seriousness was to be found in this girl. He rose with the consciousness that for a moment he had rather forgotten himself.

He reminded her gravely—"We are talking about cards—just cards."

"No," said Fran, not stirring, "we are talking about Grace Noir. You say you don't want her; you've already drawn yourself out. That leaves her to poor Bob—he'll have to take her, unless the joker gets the lady—the joker is named the devil . . . So the game isn't interesting any more." She threw down all the cards, and looked up, beaming. "My! but I'm glad you came."

He was fascinated and could not move, though as convinced as at the beginning that they should not linger thus. There might be fatal consequences; but the charm of the little girl seemed to temper this chill knowledge to the shorn lamb. He temporized: "Why don't you go on with your fortune-telling, little girl?"

"I just wanted to find out if Grace Noir is going to get you," she said candidly; "it doesn't matter what becomes of her. Were you ever on this bridge before?"

"Fran, Miss Grace is one of the best friends I have, and—and everybody admires her. The fact that you don't like her, shows that you are not all you ought to be."

Fran's drooping head hid her face. Was she contrite, or mocking?

Presently she looked up, her expression that of grave cheerfulness. "Now you've said what you thought you had to say," she remarked. "So that's over. Were you ever on this bridge before?"

Abbott was offended. "No."

"Good, good!" with vivacious enthusiasm. "Both of us must cross it at the same time and make a wish. Help me up—quick."

She reached up both hands, and Abbott lifted her to her feet.

"Whenever you cross a new bridge," she explained, "you must make a wish. It'll come true. Won't you do it, Abbott?"

"Of course. What a superstitious little Nonpareil! Do you hold hands?"

"Honest hands—" She held out both of hers. "Come on then. What are you going to wish, Abbott? But no, you mustn't tell till we're across. Oh, I'm just dying to know! Have you made up your mind, yet?"

"Yes, Fran," he answered indulgently, "it's something always in my mind."

"Now!" Fran Cried Breathlessly, "What Did You Wish?"

"About Grace Noir?"

"Nothing whatever about Miss Grace Noir."

"All right. I'm glad. Say this:

"'Slow we go,
Two in a row—'

Don't talk or anything, just wish, oh, wish with all your might—

"'With all my mind and all my heart
While we're together and after we part'—

say that."

Abbott repeated gravely:

"'With all my mind and all my heart
While we're together and after we part.'

"What are you going to wish, Fran?"

"Sh-h-h! Mum!" whispered Fran, opening her eyes wide. With slow steps they walked side by side, shoulder to shoulder, four hands clasped. Fran's great dark eyes were set fixedly upon space as they solemnly paraded beneath the watchful moon. As Abbott watched her, the witchery of the night stole into his blood.

The last plank was crossed. "Now!" Fran cried breathlessly, "what did you wish?" Her body was quivering, her face glowing.

"That I might succeed," Abbott answered.

"Oh!" said Fran. "My! That was like a cold breath. Just wishing to be great, and famous, and useful, and rich!"

Abbott laughed as light-heartedly as if the road were not calling him away from solitudes. "Well, what did you wish, Fran?"

"That you might always be my friend, while we're together, and after we part."

"It doesn't take a new bridge to make that come true," he declared.

She looked at him solemnly. "Do you understand the responsibilities of being a friend? A friend has to assume obligations, just as when a man's elected to office, he must represent his party and his platform."

"I'll stand for you!" Abbott cried earnestly.

"Will you? Then I'm going to tell you all about myself—ready to be surprised? Friends ought to know each other. In the first place, I am eighteen years old, and in the second place I am a professional lion-trainer, and in the third place my father is—but friends don't have to know each other's fathers. Besides, maybe that's enough to start with."

"Yes," said Abbott, "it is." He paused, but she could not guess his emotions, for his face showed nothing but a sort of blankness. "I should like to take this up seriatim. You tell me you are eighteen years old?"

"—And have had lots of experience."

"Your lion-training; has it been theoretical or—"

"Mercenary," Fran responded; "real lions, real bars, real spectators, real pay days."

"But, Fran," said Abbott helplessly, "I don't understand."

"But you're going to, before I'm done with you. I tell you, I'm a show-girl, a lion-trainer, a juggler. I'm the famous Fran Nonpareil, and my carnival company has showed in most of the towns and cities of the United States. It's when I'm in my blue silks and gold stars and crimson sashes, kissing my hands to the audience, that I'm the real princess."

Abbott was unable to analyze his real emotions, and his one endeavor was to hide his perplexity. He had always treated her as if she were older than the town supposed, hence the revelation of her age did not so much matter; but lion-training was so remote from conventions that it seemed in a way almost uncanny. It seemed to isolate Fran, to set her coldly apart from the people of his world.

"I'm going home," Fran said abruptly.

He followed her mechanically, too absorbed in her revelation to think of the cards left forgotten on the bridge. From their scene of good wishes, Fran went first, head erect, arms swinging defiantly; Abbott followed, not knowing in the least what to say, or even what to think.

The moon had not been laughing at them long, before Fran looked back over her shoulder and said, as if he had spoken, "Still, I'd like for you to know about it."

He quickened his step to regain her side, but was oppressed by an odd sense of the abnormal.

"Although," she added indistinctly, "it doesn't matter."

They walked on in silence until, after prolonged hesitation, he told her quietly that he would like to hear all she felt disposed to tell.

She looked at him steadily: "Can you dilute a few words with the water of your imagination, to cover a life? I'll speak the words, if you have the imagination."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

LURE OF TREASURE HUNTING

For the Sake of Romance and Adventure Do Not Discourage the Seeker of Treasure.

For the sake of romance and adventure and all that puts color into life it is to be hoped that the failure of the expedition which recently went to the Isle of Cocos in search of pirate gold will not mark the end of treasure hunting. In the interest also of the good town of Panama, where the treasure seekers are wont to outfit and buy supplies, we should point out that negative results never really proved anything. There may be gold on Cocos. There may be millions of pieces of eight and pewels galore and wine which the buccaneers, who had more than they could drink, laid aside for a rainy day. Because many treasure hunters have ransacked Cocos from end to end no man can say that the next treasure hunter will not find that for which all the others have labored and sought in vain.

Treasure hunters are of the earth's salt. They are the dreamers of great dreams, the seers of wonderful vision, the makers of romance. All the world loves or should love them. The news of the day is too much hardened with heavy reading. One wearies at last of political and social reform, of divorce and murder in sordid bar-rooms, of the cost of living and the course of the markets. There is a craving for something not so commonplace, for something less prosaic, for something which has a touch of moonshine in it. Let us not, therefore, discourage the treasure hunters with cold reason like a dash of cold water. Let us rather fan their enthusiasm and keep it forever aglow so that as long as newspapers exist there may be now and then a tale of Cocos island wedged in between the tariff and the trusts.

Such an Obvious Solution.

After Cave Johnson had served his long and brilliant career in congress and had retired to the quiet private life, he once stepped into the office of his nephew, Robert Johnson, then a young lawyer of much promise, and finding the young man engaged in writing with a gold pen, had occasion to remark upon the extravagance of the rising generation.

"Why is it," said he, "that every young man now has his gold pen, while those of my day were content to use their goosequills?"

"I suppose," replied Robert in the most innocent manner possible, "it is because there were more geese when you were a young man."

Japanese Courtesy.

A country where courtesy is a business, and business but a gentle avocation, reflects its peculiarity in the most trifling details of conduct. Such a country is Japan and such a detail recently came into notice when a city electric bureau of Tokyo asked the patrons of its street car lines how they preferred to be addressed when it was necessary to urge them to "move up." Out of the 2,719 suggestions sent in the Independent selects and translates six, as follows:

"Those not getting off, to the middle, please!"

"The middle is more comfortable!"

"I'm sorry, but all move on by one strap!"

"There's a pretty girl about the middle of the car!"

"A pickpocket has just come on board!"

The municipal authorities frowned somewhat upon the last three suggestions, but the conductors will be taught to use some of the other forms.

Is it possible that the Japanese hope to enjoy an efficient traction service on such terms? Apparently they hope to, and we pass along the Japanese idea as a helpful hint to the gentlemen who jerk a gong on the rear of our own street cars.

Quaint Critic.

George B. Luks, the painter, said to a critic in his New York studio: "Your criticism is at any rate original and amusing, my boy. It reminds me of the colored laundress in the Uffizi Gallery. "When this colored laundress visited the Uffizi, her mistress led her up to Correggio's masterpiece. "'There, Hannah, what do you think of that?' she said. "Hannah, shaking her head lugubriously, started a long while at the pictured angels whose white robes were all yellowed by time, and then, with a sigh and a disapproving shake of the head, she said: 'De saints is de last folks to put up wiv bad laundry work.'"

Efficiency.

The modern method of accomplishing two things at once in the performance of a man's household duties was recently illustrated by a North Cambridge young man. This young man was industriously mowing the large lawn in front of his house by pushing a mower in front of him with the same industry he was giving his baby a ride by dragging the baby carriage behind him with the other hand.—Boston Journal.

Perfectly Safe.

"Better lap up that spilt milk," said the first cat. "If the missus sees the mess you'll catch fits."

"Not me," said the second feline. "The woman I live with blames everything on her husband."—Louisville Courier-Journal.